



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

great a power outside the lecture room as within. No one takes greater interest in the life of the university. There is no more prominent figure at the various meetings held to create interest in foreign missionary work or the pressing social questions of the day. There is none whose loss we should feel so much.

THE LITERARY FEATURES OF THE GOSPELS.*

By G. HENRY EWING,

Amherst College, Amherst, Mass.

The problem of the synoptic gospels is a difficult and complicated one. How shall its demands be satisfied? How shall we trace back to their causes these remarkable phenomena? To determine the true place of the gospels in the literary scale, it is essential that we inquire concerning the original sources and learn what influence these exercised upon the writers. Literary criticism enables us to sift the traditions of the church and weigh external testimony; and it also leads us to construct theories and hypotheses based upon an examination of the text itself, by which results approximately correct are reached. Recourse was had to a theory which has become well established. It is an undoubted fact that the apostles in their ministry following the death of their Lord and during the persecution of the Jews and the consequent spread of Christianity, selected from the innumerable acts of Jesus certain prominent or representative words and deeds of which they made use orally. Thus a cycle of events and discourses would be constructed and would be continually gaining a more set form. It was only natural that in the entire absence of any Christian literature such an oral gospel should rise into prominence. As the early teachers of the church made use of this tradition in their conduct of religious exercises, the people must have

*Continued from January number.

grown familiar with its phraseology. The same expressions and the same thoughts would be in everyone's mouth. What an influence must this have had upon the pens of the gospel writers as they attempted to transmit to paper the same instructions and for the same purpose!

But even this, important as it is, does not entirely satisfy the conditions of the problem. A critical and comparative study reveals an interdependence of the gospels. Matthew clearly had the work of Mark before him; for, while we have reason to believe that Mark was written first, as appears in the more evident reference of Matthew to the destruction of Jerusalem, (Matt. 24: 3-31; Mrk. 13:3-27), yet there is a marked similarity in structure. In each we find passages of healing or of miracle-working alternating with passages of teaching, all which are interspersed with passages relating to rising opposition. Between Matt. 14: 1-21:46 and the corresponding passage in Mark (6: 14-12:12) the parallelism is still more remarkable. Luke, too, was probably acquainted with the gospel of Mark, but, as we have reason to judge, was independent of Matthew. * How otherwise explain the fact that in Matthew the discourse known as the Sermon on the Mount is given consecutively while in Luke the same material is scattered over several pages and given in detached portions? Why should Matthew alone have given so many details of the infancy of Jesus, and why should Luke have been the only one to relate a single incident of his boyhood?

We are told by Papias, one of the early Fathers, that Matthew wrote in Hebrew the sayings of Jesus. If so, how is it that we have only a Greek Matthew and no trace left of any such collection of sayings? The answer to this question is found in the fact that the Hebrew or Aramaic of that day was scarcely more than a dialect, and accordingly when this collection was incorporated in a Greek work of more extended scope, there was no further call to preserve the original text which would thus naturally fall into disuse and soon be lost.

Thus far we have examined some of the literary features of

*This may be readily seen by a comparison of Mark 14:13, 14 with Luke 22: 8-11; and of Mark 14:21 with Matt. 26:24; and also by comparing Matthew and Luke in the parallel passages.

the gospels, regarding them in the light (1) of the external situation and (2) of their internal relations to one another. It now remains to analyze, as we shall be able, the literary characteristics of these writings individually. We now proceed to this special criticism, considering Mark first, as occupying this position in the chronological order.

Fair conclusions may be arrived at in regard to the peculiar characteristics of Mark by the study of a single chapter. By such an analysis e. g. of the first chapter, we learn that Mark is dramatic in his vividness, his intense action, his realism, and, rhetorical in his variety and his conciseness. Very few of the discourses of Jesus are to be found in this gospel, for their introduction would only mar the action and would not accord with the terse, vigorous style of the writer. Mark relies on the impression made by a vivid description of the deeds of Jesus rather than by the slower movement of his didactic work. To Mark Jesus was the wonderful miracle worker, rather than the divine teacher.

The gospel of Matthew, as we have seen, is probably a redaction of the Aramaic *Logia* collected by the apostle himself. Its diction is more uniform and unvaried than that of the other gospels. Hebraisms are frequent, as is natural in a work derived so largely from an Aramaic original. Aramaic words are often transferred without the accompanying explanation that we find in Mark.

The distinctive aim of this gospel is, clearly, to represent Jesus as the Messiah whose advent to the earth, as a spiritual King, is the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. Directed as it is especially to the Jews, its author, himself a Jew, recognized and realized the difficulties which must have arisen in their minds when they found Jesus to be one who came to minister and not to be ministered unto—a spiritual and not a temporal King. Accordingly, we find in Matthew a greater abundance of Old Testament quotations than in any of the other gospels. The expression, “In order that it might be fulfilled” occurs again and again, so often as to be a distinguishing characteristic of this gospel. The kingship of Christ is especially emphasized by the genealogy given in the first chapter, where his descent is traced from David. In

the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus quotes several times from the Mosaic law and shows himself to be the final expansion and fulfillment of it. Undoubtedly the Scriptures of the Old Testament greatly affected the style and thought of the early Christian writers. Although the people had few written copies, the Law and the Prophets were read in the synagogues and the familiar words were passed from mouth to mouth. So strongly were the forms of conversation and the channels of argument affected by this diffusion of the Old Testament Scriptures that indirect allusions are found throughout the gospels even more abundantly than explicit quotations.

But Matthew's gospel was founded on no such narrow basis as to confine Jesus' ministry to the Jews. While first of all King of the Jews, he was as truly the King of the whole world, and Matthew dwells on the universality of Christ's mission. He quotes the broad principle of the new Kingdom as laid down by its founder, "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother." Matthew, more than either of the other synoptic writers, records the opposition of Jesus to the narrow prejudices and the bigotry of the Jews and his condemnation of their unbelief and obstinacy. (See Matt. 13: 10-16; 23: 1-39).

The gospel of Luke presents a pleasing contrast to the production of Matthew. From first to last, it is full of joy. It begins with hymns and ends with praises. "Glory to God" is the key to the whole gospel; it is indeed a message of good tidings. To it we owe the record of the great hymns of the church—the "Benedictus," the "Magnificat" and "Nunc dimittis" together with the "Ave Maria" and the "Gloria in excelsis;" so that its author deserves the appellation of the first Christian hymnologist.

This has been called the most literary of the gospels. The writer begins with a specific and personal statement of the contents of his production and tells us of his endeavor to give an accurate account, in order, of the events of Christ's life. In diction Luke shows a fondness for classical compounds and expressions peculiar to him are numerous. His Greek is scholarly; his style of expression shows ability as a writer;

his sentences are more rounded and rhetorical than even the rhetorical Mark. But his diction is more uneven than that of either Matthew or Mark. One cause of this feature is easily traced to the sources referred to in his preface. These, we learn, consisted of several previous attempts to preserve in writing the biography of Jesus. They evidently were in Hebrew, at least in part, and may have included the primitive Aramaic of Matthew. Through the influence of these attempts, Luke's gospel has received Hebraistic tinges in many passages. As Mark was guided in his writing by Peter's words, so Luke, who was an intimate companion of Paul, must have been influenced in his conceptions by the broad spirit of the Hellenistic missionary.

The third gospel has come down to us as the most complete record of the life of Christ. Luke alone dwells on the months preceding Christ's birth, telling us of Zacharias, Elizabeth and Mary, and of Simeon and Anna; and he alone has given to mankind a single glimpse of the youth of Jesus. To Luke we have also to turn for the extended account of the last journey to Jerusalem (9: 51-18: 14). He holds forth the humanity of Christ and makes prominent his compassion for the poor, the outcast and the bereaved. He also records six notable occasions when Jesus engaged in prayer. This is also the most universal and catholic in its spirit of all the synoptic gospels. It relates the parables of the Good Samaritan, of the Pharisee and publican, and of the Prodigal Son, all of which go to show that Christ came to save both Jews and Gentiles.

The contrast between the gospel of John and the synoptic gospels is evident at first sight. The tradition that St. John when he found in the writings of the other evangelists the bodily history of the Lord, composed a spiritual gospel, expresses the true relations which exist between these writings. It was only after the intervention of many years that the fourth gospel was written,—years of rapid growth in the Christian church—years in which the apostle had attained to a ripe maturity and could address his flock at Ephesus as “little children.” How changed was the writer of that spiritualized gospel, that gospel of love and tenderness, from the

hasty disciple who in his wrath would call down devouring fire upon the heads of the inhospitable Samaritans! Yet how truly the same, for who but the loved apostle whose head rested on the Master's bosom, and into whose hands the dying Christ intrusted his mother, could have reached to that infinite conception of the Saviour of the world which represented him as the Incarnate Word of God? The difference was not one of character but of development of character. The very simplicity of his style and thought is a result of that balanced depth of character which could pierce the mysteries of the new Kingdom and with true poetic insight could, amid the complex and uncertain conceptions of the Messiah, then so prevalent, present in all their simplicity the truths which lie at the foundation of the Master's teaching. While all the gospels are in a sense biographies, the gospel of John represents most truly the philosophy of the life of Jesus in distinction from the more purely historical features found in the synoptic gospels. There was need of a work of this character; heretical sects had arisen and were asserting their subversive doctrines regarding the personality of Christ. If the doctrine of the "Word made flesh" was not emphasized as the keynote of John's gospel solely to refute the dualism of the Gnostics, these certainly found their doctrines thoroughly antagonized by the whole spirit of the work. John's was a contemplative nature he was loth to enter into polemical discussions and we find that far from being controversial the express statement is made that "these [words] are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

The gospel of John is supplementary to the synoptic gospels. Very little of the material in the former is found in the latter; yet such landmarks are given that we can locate the events which it contains in their proper relation to the general history in the other narratives. It is supplementary not only in the additional facts related, which are comparatively few, but also in its conception of the Christ, as brought out in his recorded discourses. It is here that we learn of Jesus as the Word which was in the beginning with God and which was God; and of the unity of Father and Son. Accordingly the gospel is largely devoted to a record of the

words of Christ. Here alone are to be found the important discourses of his last ministry in Jerusalem, which shed so much light on his lofty spiritual nature.

Perhaps the central feature of John's style is its extreme simplicity combined with comprehensiveness and depth. The simplicity of his vocabulary is marked by the frequent occurrence of characteristic words, such as, "word," "truth," "love," "life," "light." But more than this, it also extends to the construction and the combination of sentences. John avoids complexity. He prefers co-ordinate conjunctions to subordinate. Repetition is used for clearness and in order to avoid the use of subordinate clauses. The introductory sentences of the gospel illustrate well this simplicity.

The fourth gospel is poetic both in form and in thought. Throughout we see the working of a Hebrew mind. The author quotes frequently from the Jewish Scriptures, seeking to show how they point to Jesus as the promised Messiah. Parallelisms such as underlie all Hebrew poetry are to be found. Instances of this feature are frequent. (See 8: 14, 15, 18, 23; 14:27.) The gospel deals with infinite truths. Is it strange, then, that its style should reflect the ethereal purity and spirituality of the thought? Is it a matter of surprise that one who had been a most intimate companion of Jesus during his ministry, and who by his intense love for him had obtained a deeper insight than any of the other disciples into the depths of the infinite heart of Christ should seek the highest and most permanent form of expression for his overflowing thoughts?

With John's gospel the unity of the inspired record of Christ's life is completed. The temple in which Jesus the Christ is ever to be found the central figure was finished. Wrought by human art, it stands and will stand throughout the ages, for the divine hand has inwrought in its very fabric the true elements of permanency. So long as the infinite and eternal Son of God lives and rules in the hearts of men, so long will the gospel story which embodies his words and deeds, live to win and save the lives of men.